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AUTHOR Stevens, K. J.; Crowther, H. I. G.
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ABSTRACT

Young urban teachers assigned to rural schools in Queensland, Australia, experience difficulties in adjustment related to isolation from family, friends, and other professionals. Twelve teachers in a small remote settlement and 12 teachers in a rural school close to a suburban area completed a questionnaire exploring their relationships with their pupils, the community, and the State Board of Education, and their perceptions of their own professional positions and morale. All the teachers were young, urban, and relatively inexperienced, and all had been assigned to their positions by the State Department of Education. In comparison to the less isolated teachers, teachers in the remote settlement: (1) had more difficulty separating their profession from their social lives; (2) were less able to establish appropriate relationships with their pupils; (3) felt more alienated from the rural lifestyle around them; (4) felt more strongly that the State Department of Education was insensitive, and; (5) expressed less confidence in their own professional abilities. Almost all teachers in both schools said that they would not remain in their present positions if they did not get the positions they wanted, a response with ominous significance for the future of rural Australian schools. Unless rural teachers' professional isolation is recognized, it is unlikely that the position of rural pupils can be improved. The study questionnaire and 34 references are included. (SW)

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ORIENTATION TO TEACHING IN TWO RURAL SCHOOLS

K.J. Stevens
Victoria University of
Wellington.

H.I.G. Crowther
James Cook University of
North Queensland

Paper Presented at the New Zealand Association for Research of Education Annual Conference, University of Waikato, 27-30 November, 1986.

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ORIENTATION TO TEACHING IN TWO RURAL SCHOOLS

For over a decade a variety of reports (Karmel 1973, Schools Commission 1975, Fitzgerald 1976) have designated rural education a disadvantaged sector of Australian society. In a country as large as Australia however, rural education has a variety of meanings (Behrens 1977): in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, western New South Wales and the Northern Territory it refers to education in schools that are isolated from major centres of population by vast distances. In Victoria, Tasmania and eastern New South Wales, where patterns of settlement are relatively close, it refers to education beyond the major cities.

Defining the concept "rural" has troubled social scientists for decades (Bealer 1975, 1983, Falk and Pinhey 1978, Friedland 1982, Gilbert 1982, Lantz and Murphy 1978, Miller and Luloff 1981, Picou et al 1978) and this, ultimately, has been a pointless diversion. It has been claimed (Nash 1980) that:

> "...The problems of rural education are not different in kind from those in urban areas, and are certainly not brought about by any supposedly necessary characteristics of rural life, but are to be understood as determined by the relationships which exist between the urban centres and the rural areas."
> (emphasis ours).

This is reflected in the teaching profession according to Turney et al (1980):

> "....the majority of difficulties confronting teachers in inner-city schools will probably be little different in nature from those faced by teachers in suburban or even rural schools...."

This paper will explore the orientation to teaching of teachers in two different types of rural schools in Queensland. The first school (School A) is located in the western interior of the state in a small settlement and is isolated from other communities by considerable distances. The second rural school (School B) is not typical of Queensland in that it is located in a relatively closely settled area in the hinterland of two major coastal cities. In this way schools A and B represent the two types of rural schools in Australia identified above.

This paper will provide a preliminary exploration of what it is like to be a teacher in rural Queensland in terms of Nash's (1980) thesis that:

> "...the problems of rural education are ... to be understood as determined by the relationships which exist between the urban centres and the rural areas."

A variety of studies have drawn attention to the complexities and difficulties of rural teachers in Australia (Adsett 1974; Aust. Teachers' Federation 1976; Cusack 1974; Green 1967; McGaw et al 1975; Reid 1969; Stevens 1981, 1983; Storey 1969; Taylor 1969, 1970) which together with the

extensive experience the authors have had in schools A and B respectively make it possible to outline the rural environment in general terms.

Firstly, teachers are usually sent to rural schools by the State Department of Education to whom they are usually bonded, and only in very rare instances do they apply for positions in remote areas. An outstanding feature of teachers in rural schools is their youthfulness and lack of professional experience.

Secondly, living conditions in many outback areas come as a shock to young teachers who are used to urban lifestyles (Schools Commission 1975, Fitzgerald 1976, Stevens 1981) and this has contributed to their feelings of alienation from the communities they are expected to serve. Turnover is high (Turney 1980, Stevens 1981) and this has resulted in a perceived lack of commitment of young teachers within rural communities.

A major feature of teaching in rural Queensland is the lack of professional contact at an early (and therefore critical) stage of a teacher's career. Young teachers do not have experienced colleagues to help with problems and do not have peers in nearby schools with whom they can confer.

Many young rural teachers lack guidance in undertaking basic tasks such as choosing textbooks, coping with student assessment, new curricula and unwilling students. Such teachers usually develop a strong awareness of the workings of the state education

system which exiled them to a remote part of the country, together with an intense interest in learning how to persuade that system to return them to urban environments at the earliest opportunity.

In summary, teachers in rural Queensland schools are usually young, unsettled, unsure of their professional directions, lacking in guidance, and, above all, resentful of their exile. Rural teachers are likely then, to be out-ward looking, that is, looking beyond their rural schools and communities to urban areas to families, colleagues, employers (the State Education Department), and their future careers. The nature of the relationship between rural teachers and urban centres is described using a modified version of an instrument developed by Campbell (1975). (See Appendix). Teachers in rural schools A and B (N=24) were all from urban backgrounds and, accordingly, their experiences must be considered in terms of their on-going relationships with urban centres. The teachers then, were urban people living in rural areas and four distinct but inter-related relationships can be perceived in their orientation to teaching, viz: relationships with rural pupils and their communities, with the Queensland Department of Education which is based in Brisbane, with other members of the teaching profession throughout Australia, and finally, in their own subjective assessments of the relationship between themselves as urban teachers in rural schools and their futures in the profession.

Relationships Between Urban Teachers and their Rural Pupils

Teachers were asked several questions about the nature of their relationships with pupils and the rural communities in which they lived:

	School A								School B							
	Frequency				Concern				Frequency				Concern			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I feel that the attitude of pupils makes my job impossible	3	2	5	2	3	2	2	5	1	6	5	0	1	5	4	1
I feel that my job interferes with my social life	5	3	4	0	7	2	3	0	8	3	1	0	7	1	1	2
I feel I am prevented from establishing appropriate relationships with pupils	4	4	1	3	6	2	2	2	6	4	2	0	5	4	1	1
I feel that the status I am accorded by the community is not commensurate with the importance of my job	6	2	3	1	6	2	3	1	5	2	5	0	4	4	3	0

KEY

(a) Frequency

4 I experience this all the time
3 I experience this sometimes
2 I experience this rarely
1 I never experience this

(b) Concern

4 This is of very great concern to me
3 This is of moderate concern to me
2 This is of slight concern to me
1 This is of no concern to me

The above responses indicate that in the more remote school (School A) teachers found it difficult to separate their profession from their social lives although in each school, only a minority of teachers found this a matter for concern. This can in part be explained by the observation of many teachers that they did not have social lives in the communities in which they lived as they either left town in the weekends (especially those in School B) or mixed largely with each other out of school hours.

More teachers in School A than in School B felt that they were unable to establish appropriate relationships with pupils suggesting that in addition to the remote location in which they lived, they experienced a measure of professional isolation. Several women teachers in School A expressed feelings of alienation about the life-styles they observed in the outback and in particular, concern about the subordination of members of their sex in virtually all aspects of life. A major barrier to establishing close relationships with people by young women teachers was their consciousness of their higher educations and the incongruity of this in the environments in which they found themselves. Most women in these communities did not have jobs and none had professions. Young, single, tertiary-educated women teachers found little companionship and often experienced loneliness and strong feelings of alienation from the communities in which they taught. Fewer teachers in the more remote school (School A) noted that they were not accorded appropritae status by the community. In School B teachers were not the sole professionals in the community and many perceived that they were accorded lower social status than they expected.

Relationships Between Teachers and the State Department of Education

Teachers in schools A and B gave the following responses to questions on the nature of their relationship to their employer, the Queensland Department of Education:

	School A								School B							
	Frequency				Concern				Frequency				Concern			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I feel I am a pawn in an insensitive bureaucracy	0	2	5	5	1	3	2	6	2	3	6	1	4	1	4	2
Conditions under which I teach prevent me from doing a professional job	1	5	4	2	2	3	3	4	4	1	4	3	3	2	3	3
I am unclear on the scope and responsibilities of my job	5	4	2	1	4	4	2	2	9	3	0	0	7	3	1	0
I'll not be able to satisfy conflicting demands	5	6	1	0	4	5	1	2	7	5	0	0	7	4	0	0
I do not know what the Education Dept thinks of me	2	3	5	2	5	2	5	0	5	3	4	0	5	3	2	1
I can't get information needed to carry out my job	3	5	3	1	3	3	4	2	4	6	2	0	4	4	2	1
I feel frustrated by the magnitude of the task and the inadequacy of resources	4	4	4	0	3	2	6	1	4	4	4	0	4	2	3	2

(See Key Page 5)

Teachers in Schools A and B expressed different attitudes towards their employer. In the more remote school there were stronger feelings about the insensitivity of the Department and its officers. Within the de-centralized administrative structure of education in Australian states, school B was relatively close to the regional offices of the Department, whereas school A had few visits from either central or regional representatives and was geographically remote from both. It is not surprising therefore to find that teachers in School A felt less well informed about the scope of their responsibilities and indicated in the above responses, less understanding of how they were regarded as teachers by Departmental officers. Almost half the teachers in School A pointed out that this was a matter of concern to them.

A third of the teachers in School A indicated that they found difficulty in getting necessary information to do their jobs properly and indicated that this too was a matter of concern. This was not reported as a problem or a matter of concern in the less isolated school (School B).

Relationships Between Teachers and the Teaching Profession.

A range of questions about the ways teachers in each school perceived themselves in relation to the teaching profession provides insights into day to day interaction between local and non-local aspects of life in rural schools.

	School A								School B							
	Frequency				Concern				Frequency				Concern			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I have too little say in matters of curriculum and teaching methods	4	4	2	2	3	2	6	1	3	5	2	2	4	3	3	1
I feel overwhelmed by new teaching demands made upon me	4	5	2	1	4	3	3	1	4	2	5	1	3	3	4	1
Classes are too large to enable me to do a professional job	5	6	1	0	7	4	1	0	4	4	3	1	3	2	4	2
I have too little authority in the school to carry out responsibilities	5	4	1	2	2	2	5	3	8	3	1	0	7	3	1	0
I feel I am not fully qualified to handle my job	5	4	3	0	4	3	5	0	6	5	0	1	6	4	0	1
I feel unable to influence the Principals decisions that affect me	5	3	3	1	3	6	2	1	6	5	0	1	7	2	2	0
I feel I may not be liked and accepted by the people I work with	0	3	5	4	1	3	6	2	7	5	0	0	6	5	0	0
I do not know what the people I work with expect of me	5	6	1	0	3	5	4	0	8	4	0	0	4	6	0	0

	School A								School B							
	Frequency				Concern				Frequency				Concern			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
The amount of work I have to do may interfere with how well it is done	1	1	6	4	1	3	4	4	2	3	6	1	2	2	5	2
I have to do things on the job against my better judgement	1	2	8	1	1	2	3	6	4	5	3	0	2	7	1	1
I feel disheartened by lack of commitment and low morale of my colleagues in the service	3	3	6	0	2	0	4	6	6	3	3	0	5	3	3	0

(See Key Page 5)

Several issues can be detected in the above relationship between the teachers and their profession. Teachers in School B reported more new teaching demands on them than teachers in School A. This is a matter that requires further investigation but the closer contact with Departmental officers that has been noted and the closer relationships with pupils in school B should be considered in this context. Teachers in the more remote school expressed less confidence in their abilities to handle their jobs which again can be related to the lower level of contact they had with the Queensland Department of Education. Almost half the teachers in

School A were concerned about this.

Teachers in School A expressed stronger feelings of powerlessness in influencing their Principals, and, although this is possibly related to the personalities of the head teachers in each school, it contributes to the overall picture of professional isolation experienced by teachers in the more remote school.

There was a major difference between schools A and B in that 75% of teachers in School A expressed feelings of not being liked by the people they worked with and this can in part be explained by their responses to the last three questions. Most teachers in School A indicated that the quality of their teaching suffered because too much work was required, and of particular importance, that they were required to do things against their better judgement. A major issue facing teachers in School A was the provision of Vocational Guidance for pupils and their families, an area in which none felt competent. Easier access to both professional and lay assistance in School B in the provision of this service removed a major concern.

Urban Teachers in Rural Schools

Teachers in Schools A and B were asked to rate their responses to the following questions:

All Things Considered, How Satisfying Do You Find Teaching As A Career?

		School A	School B
(a)	Highly Satisfying	3	2
(b)	Moderately Satisfying	5	7
(c)	Neutral	1	1
(d)	Moderately dissatisfying	3	1
(e)	Highly dissatisfying	-	-

How Satisfying Do You Find Teaching In A Rural Community?

		School A	School B
(a)	Highly Satisfying	4	6
(b)	Moderately Satisfying	4	4
(c)	Neutral	1	2
(d)	Moderately dissatisfying	3	-
(e)	Highly dissatisfying	-	-

All Things Considered, What Do You Think You Will Be Doing Three Years From Now?

		School A	School B
(a)	Retired from Teaching	1	1
(b)	Teaching in a Primary School	-	2
(c)	Teaching in a Secondary School	8	5
(d)	Lecturing in a Tertiary Institute	-	1
(e)	Working in Educational Administration	-	-
(f)	Working as a Specialist in Education (eg. Counsellor, teacher of handicapped etc)	-	1
(g)	Working in Another Position Out of Education	2	1
(h)	Full-time Housewife	1	1
(i)	Working in this Rural School	-	-
(j)	Working in Another Rural School	-	-

Would You Remain In This Or Another Rural School If You Could Not Secure A Position Of Your Choice?

	School A	School B
Yes	2	1
No	10	11

The above responses indicate that most teachers in both schools found teaching in a rural community satisfying although most of the dissatisfaction that was expressed came from teachers in school A. Most teachers saw their futures as teachers but none intended to remain in a rural area. Almost all of the teachers in each school responded that they would not remain in their present positions if they did not get the positions they wanted. This response has ominous significance for the future of rural Australian schools.

CONCLUSION

Research into rural education has been dominated by issues of disadvantage (Edington, 1970) inequality of opportunity (Fyfield 1970; Verco and Whiteman, 1970) and concern about the quality of schools provided for outback children (Edgar 1978, Schools Commission 1975). It has been pointed out that a major problem in considering rural education in Australia is the existence of a myth that the rural minority are somehow "basically 'different' from the city people" (Bessant, 1978). A major report noted:

> "One problem which emerges in rural schools is that in most cases the content of schooling is not tailored to students' needs but simply replicates that of urban schools. This is justified by teachers who have been trained to accept the policy that general curricula, universally available,

> constitute the best basis for learning and preparation for the future....it seems that the background and cultural reality of country children are ignored."
>
> (Fitzgerald, 1976)

The range of practical difficulties that young, inexperienced urban teachers face in rural areas will ensure that such ideals are not met. The rural teachers in both schools faced double isolation: not only were they sent to live and work in remote parts of the country, in doing so they were isolated from their profession and their employers. Further research is needed to address the position of teachers in other rural communities (Maclaine 1966, Lauglo, 1982). Unless the rural teachers' professional isolation is recognized, it is unlikely that steps can be taken to improve the position of rural pupils.

TEACHERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Sex _____ 2. Age _____ 3. Marital Status _____

4.(i) How many years of education did you receive after secondary school? (Include both full-time and part-time education reduced to its full-time equivalent) _____

(ii) a. Have you completed a teacher training course? _____

b. If "Yes", how long was this course? _____

c. At what institution was the course conducted? _____

_____

d. What award did you receive? _____

(iii) a. Have you completed a degree? _____

b. If "Yes", at what institution? _____

c. What award(s) did you receive? (B.A., B.Sc., etc)

_____

(iv) a. Have you gained other qualifications relevant to your teaching duties?

_____

b. If "Yes" from what source? _____

c. What award(s) did you receive? _____

5. For what level(s) of schooling were you initially trained as a teacher? (Kindergarten/lower primary/upper primary/technical/lower secondary/ upper secondary) _____

_____

6. (i) How many years of teaching experience (subsequent to training) have you had? (include this year)

_____

(ii) How many years of teaching experience have you had altogether? (Include here experience before training, if any)

_____

(iii) How many years have you been teaching at your present school?

7. If your teaching experience has not been continuous, please give details of how and why it was interrupted. _____

_____

_____

8. Satisfactions.

Please think back over your experiences within the teaching profession and tell of an incident that gave you a high measure of job satisfaction.

9. Please state as precisely as you can, why you felt the way you did.

10. Dissatisfactions

Please think back over your experiences within the teaching profession and tell of an incident that gave you a high measure of job-dissatisfaction.

11. Please state as precisely as you can, why you felt the way you did.

12. Morale Boosters.

Please think back over your experience within the teaching profession and tell of an incident that boosted your morale in the sense that you felt inspired to work co-operatively with others in pursuit of common objectives.

12a. Please state as precisely as you can, why you felt the way you did.

13. Morale Destroyers.

Please think back over your experiences within the teaching profession and tell of an incident that had a destructive influence on your morale, in the sense that you felt less inspired to work co-operatively with others in the pursuit of common objectives.

_____

_____

_____

_____

13a. Please state as precisely as you can, why you felt the way you did.

_____

_____

_____

14. All things considered, how satisfying do you find teaching as a career? (tick one)

a. Highly satisfying ( )

b. Moderately satisfying ( )

c. Neutral ( )

d. Moderately dissatisfying ( )

e Highly dissatisfying ( )

15. How satisfying do you finding teaching in a rural community? (tick one)

a. Highly satisfying ( )

b. Moderately satisfying ( )

c. Neutral ( )

d. Moderately dissatisfying ( )

e. Highly dissatisfying ( )

16. All things considered, what do you think you will most likely be doing three years from now?

a. Retired from teaching ( )

b. Teaching in a primary school ( )

c. Teaching in a secondary school ( )

d. Lecturing in tertiary institution (college or university) ( )

e. Working in educational administration (headmaster or other school official) ( )

f. Working as a specialist in education ( )
(e.g.counsellor, teacher of handicapped, school socialworker, etc.) ( )

g. Working in another position of education ( )

h. Full-time housewife ( )

i. Working in this rural school ( )

j. Working in another rural school ( )

17. For each item below, I would like you to indicate both the frequency and the degree of the concern you feel.

Please begin by rating all items for frequency in Column A according to the following scale:

4 = I experience this nearly all the time
3 = I experience this sometimes
2 = I experience this rarely
1 = I never experience this
(At this stage, ignore Column B).

	A	B
a. I feel that I am a pawn within an insensitive bureaucracy.	( )	( )
b. I feel that the kind of conditions under which I teach prevent me from doing a truly professional job.	( )	( )
c. I feel that I have too little say in matters of curriculum and teaching methods.	( )	( )
d. I feel overwhelmed by the new teaching demands that are made upon me.	( )	( )
e. I feel that the attitude of the pupils makes my job impossible.	( )	( )
f. I feel that the classes are too large to enable me to do a truly professional job.	( )	( )
g. I feel that I have too little authority in the school to carry out the responsibilities assigned to me.	( )	( )
h. I am unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are.	( )	( )
i. I think that I'll not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over me.	( )	( )
j. I feel that I am not fully qualified to handle my job.	( )	( )
k. I do not know what the Education Department thinks of me, or how they evaluate my performance.	( )	( )
l. I believe that I can't get information or aids needed to carry out my job.	( )	( )
m. I feel unable to influence the principal's decisions and actions that affect me.	( )	( )
n. I feel that I may not be liked and accepted by the people I work with.	( )	( )

o. I do not know just what the people I work with expect of me. ( ) ( )

p. I think that the amount of work I have to do may interfere with how well it gets done. ( ) ( )

q. I feel that I have to do things on the job that are against my better judgment. ( ) ( )

r. I feel that my job tends to interfere with my social life. ( ) ( )

s. I feel that I am prevented from establishing appropriate relationships with pupils. ( ) ( )

t. I feel that the status which I am accorded by the community is not commensurate with the importance of my job. ( ) ( )

u. I feel frustrated by the magnitude of the task and the inadequacy of resources. ( ) ( )

v. I feel disheartened by the general lack of commitment and the low morale of many of my colleagues within the service. ( ) ( )

Now please go back to item a. and rate in Column B, according to the following scale for degree of concern:

4 = This is of very great concern to me.

3 = This is of moderate concern to me.

2 = This is of slight concern to me.

1 = This does not concern me at all.

	YES	NO
18. Would you remain in this or another rural school if you could not secure a position in a school of your choice?	( )	( )

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